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SOCIAL STRUCTURE

2. INTERNAL ORGANIZATION: AUTHORITY AND MACHINERY OF JUSTICE

In the internal organization of Shamirpet two different units can be clearly delineated. The socio-religious organization of the village with its independent set of office-bearers and functionaries is quite distinct from the administrative organization of government and semi-government officials.

The following diagram will illustrate the internal organization of the village in socio-religious matters:

Deshmukh
(Headman of the village)

Panchayat
(Village council)

Ganadi
(Organizers of village ritual)

Kulam-pedda
(Headmen of the different castes)

Peddamanshi
or
Inti-pedda
(Head of the family)

The Deshmukh is the hereditary headman of the village. He is the richest person in the settlement and has very considerable landed property. His forefathers became the headmen of the village some three hundred years ago, and since then the family has retained the title and office. By virtue of his wealth, position and the contacts he maintains with powerful government officials, the Deshmukh is a pivotal figure in the village and enjoys a position of great influence. Although his word is no longer law, he still wields very great influence in the village and is always given a place of honour at all village ceremonies. Village disputes of any importance are always referred to him, and his decisions and wishes are seldom disregarded. However, the Deshmukh takes very few decisions on his own authority and initiative. He seeks the help of the *panchayat*, which can be regarded as the central council for the village as a whole. Of course, the Deshmukh takes a prominent part in the deliberations and discussions of the *panchayat* and often guides it in such a way that his wishes in the matter are carried out.

The *panchayat* or village council consists of the headmen of

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there the procession starts in the direction of the Hanuman shrine outside the village. The Madiga drum-beaters are at the head of the procession. At some distance from them are the Deshmukh, the Brahmin and the other elders. These are followed by the other villagers. At the shrine the Brahmin worships the *shami* leaves and the goddess Durga. When the worship is over people snatch the leaves. Then follows the important social act of exchange of these leaves and a friendly embrace. Between castes of equal social status and between persons of equal kinship and age status within the caste itself, the exchange is on a basis of equality. For example, A will take a few leaves from B; and B will take a few from A. The two will then lock each other in an embrace for a few seconds. On the other hand, people of high caste will give some leaves to those of the low and untouchable castes; and the latter will respond by bowing down to touch the feet of the former. In the case of the untouchables this is a symbolic gesture, for they touch the earth near the feet of their superiors and not the feet. Within the caste itself the nature of this exchange is determined by the age and kinship status of the persons concerned. As a general rule elders and persons with a recognized superior status give some leaves to the juniors; and the latter, in their turn, bend down to touch the feet of their elders. On this day people are expected to forget their quarrels of the last year, and to meet each other in a spirit of friendship. In fact, many petty differences are forgotten, and several people who were hitherto not on speaking terms resume normal friendly relations again.

Deepavali. Deepavali or the 'festival of lights' is one of the most important Hindu festivals and is observed throughout Hindu India. The celebrations extend to two days—the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the dark fortnight of the month of Ashvina. On the first of these two days, known as *Narka Chaturdashi* or *Bhogi*, Hindus get up very early and have their bath. Women in the higher castes, especially among Brahmins, Komtis and Reddis, take lighted lamps on a plate and, waving them before their husbands, perform the *arati* rite otherwise reserved for gods. This has to be completed before the break of dawn. Later in the day images of gods and deities in the house are worshipped and specially cooked dishes are offered to them. In the evening a large number of little earthen lamps are lighted and arranged in front of the house; in other parts of the house, too, one or more of these lamps

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can work for wages and has considerable freedom of movement. Sexual lapses on her part are more liberally viewed. If the husband beats her, she too can beat him. If the abuses of her husband are loud, hers can be louder still. She can leave her husband and take another with comparative ease, and without any social stigma. This would permanently lower the status of persons on the upper level, and would be commented upon very adversely in the intermediate class. The family secrets are announced to the outside world by the members of the family itself in their open-air quarrels. Compromises are often made through mediation and arbitration, but may be disregarded with comparative ease after a few days.

It is probably needless to say that the above three levels are not fixed, nor are they exclusive. Modern education and other modern means of communication—especially the cinema—often infuse a spirit of romantic individualism into the youth of the upper level, who, rather than working for family solidarity, often disintegrate it. Education, urban contacts, 'disgust with rustic ways', and desire for greater respectability according to accepted social standards in some cases set in motion efforts at vertical movement in families on the lower levels.

2. INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONS WITHIN THE FAMILY

HUSBAND AND WIFE

According to the traditional norms of the society a husband is expected to be an authoritarian figure whose will should always dominate the domestic scene. As the head of the household he should demand respect and obedience from his wife and children. The wife should regard him as her 'master' and should 'serve him faithfully'. It is the husband's responsibility to provide adequately for the support and maintenance of 'his dependants' and the wife's duty is to 'run the household frugally and efficiently'. In an ideal home 'all major decisions are taken by the husband in consultation with his wife and grown-up children', but the final say in all matters connected with the family is always with the husband. The husband should 'watch the activities and ways of his wife' as well as 'take care of the proper upbringing of his children'. The wife should 'serve her husband with loyalty and devotion'. The husband is 'superior'; the wife is his 'subordinate'. As a mark of the recognition of his superiority, the wife shows respect to her

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Muslim
Hindus

CHAPTER SIX

The Levels of Living

1. STATUS DIFFERENTIATION IN THE COMMUNITY

Six major factors contribute towards status differentiation in the village community of Shamirpet. They are:

i. Religion and caste.
ii. Landownership.
iii. Wealth.
iv. Position in government service and village organization.
v. Age.
vi. Distinctive personality traits.

Religion divides the community into two distinct groups: the Hindus and Muslims, standing out in marked contrast to each other. Hinduism is the older and longer established religion, and the majority of people in the village are Hindus. The Muslim group is largely composed of local converts, drawn from a number of castes—high and low. The Hindus naturally have a feeling of superiority regarding their religious faith and its antiquity, and do not view with favour the indiscriminate mixing of different castes in the Muslim community. But until 1948 they could not express these feelings openly as the Muslims had the backing of the State administration. The State was under Muslim rule, and being of the 'ruling race' the village Muslims were naturally in an advantageous position. They claimed superiority over the Hindus, and tried to dominate the village scene. While practical considerations forced the Hindus to remain silent, the Muslims aggressively denounced them as heathens. It had its reaction: after the Police Action, when Hyderabad was no longer a feudal

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Hindus
Muslims

779 Muslim State, the Hindus had their revenge by pouring scorn
798 openly on Muslim religion and society. It was now the turn of the Muslims to observe silence, and tolerate humiliation and insults. At the time of our investigations, however, most of these passions had subsided, and no significant tensions were observed. As groups both Hindus and Muslims regard themselves as superior
[564] in point of religion. From the socio-economic point of view the Muslims can be regarded as an exclusive caste whose social standing is roughly equal to that of the agricultural castes.

564 Caste as a factor of social differentiation is more significant. It has been pointed out that in its structure, the caste system has definitely a hierarchical character. Between the highest and the lowest castes, there are several intermediate levels. The social status of a person is largely determined by his caste. The mere fact of birth in a particular caste gives a good initial start to some and puts obstacles in the way of others. In a subsequent chapter I propose to examine some of the stereotypes current in the village community regarding the qualities and characteristics of different castes; but notwithstanding these the relative position of the different castes in the village community is determined by the traditional scale.

●554 Religion and caste are more or less fixed and permanent factors. While change of faith is possible, and under certain circumstances a person can even descend from one of the higher castes to the lowest, such changes are very rare. At any rate no one takes recourse to them to bring about a change in his social status.
[771] The only case of change of faith recorded by us in the village is that of the present headmaster of the school who was a Brahmin to begin with, but later embraced Islam. No case of change of caste came to our notice.

556 In a predominantly agricultural society it is natural to expect that possession of land and cattle would contribute greatly to an individual's social status. Birth into a family of landowners ensures that a person will grow up to be a respected member of the village community. Acquisition of land would very materially affect the social position even of a person of humble birth, and if he does not behave tactlessly it would greatly enhance his prestige. An untouchable Mala peasant is now counted among the influential cultivators of the village and is given a place of honour in its counsels. He is still an untouchable and would continue to remain

LEVELS OF LIVING

888 Age is still another important factor of status differentiation.
554 As a general rule the aged and elderly people should be respected: they have 'the authority of grey hair' and wide experience of the vicissitudes of life. The younger members must consult the elders of the extended family in all important matters, and should give due regard to their suggestions and advice. Even where the obligations which emerge from kinship ties do not dictate this respectful behaviour, it is considered polite for young people to show regard to the elders. Intimate social relations, even outside one's family and caste, find expression in the adoption of kinship terminology and one must address the people of another family as 'grandfather', 'uncle' or 'brother' according to their respective ages. Deliberate disregard or disrespect to village elders is adversely commented upon in the society.

555 Finally, distinctive personality traits and possession of uncommon or difficult skills also adds to the prestige of an individual and consequently alters his status in society. Ability to talk persuasively and impressively is regarded as a definite asset. An individual's success or failure in inter-personal relations, as well as his advancement in society in general, would depend to a considerable extent on this factor. Sense of humour is an allied personality trait which is greatly admired. One who can make others laugh is regarded as highly desirable company. Special knowledge and skills contribute substantially towards enhancing an individual's prestige. Two persons belonging to the Sale caste have risen in social esteem because of their local reputation as village doctors practising the indigenous system of medicine, although the traditional status of their caste is not very high. C. R., an untouchable Madiga, enjoys some social prestige because he composes songs in the folk style. B., a barber, too has a similar reputation for being a local composer.

554 562 Four other factors should also be taken into account at this stage. They are sex, education, urban contacts and political affiliations. Of these, considerations regarding the first are ingrained in the social pattern; the other three have a comparatively recent origin. In general man is regarded as superior to woman. In the internal organization of the village all offices are held by men, and with the exception of a few families which have no adult male members, it is a man who is regarded as the head of the family. However, the status of a woman is governed largely by the

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other factors, particularly her caste, landownership and wealth, age, distinctive personality traits, and relationship to persons holding a government or village office. But within the same caste, income-group and age-group, the position of a woman will definitely be inferior to that of a man.

Education is now regarded as important, because it provides 'the key to' the understanding of the 'wide world' and equips one better to assert one's rights and claim one's due from officials and the cunning townspeople. It is easier for educated people to get government jobs. It is generally believed that they can contact and influence government officers much better than their illiterate counterparts in the village. However, most of the 'educated' people in the village had just four years of schooling in village schools. No one has so far had any higher education. At the time of our investigations four boys from the village were studying in secondary schools in the city, and they are the first people in the village to learn the English language. Economic benefits and gain in social prestige derived through modern education have made it a mark of respectability, and it is expected that in the near future a larger number of village boys will attend secondary schools in Secundrabad and Hyderabad.

Although there is considerable prejudice and scepticism among the village people regarding city ways and other urban traits of culture, in general it may be said that the village-folk acknowledge the importance and superiority of the townspeople. Those who have urban contacts seek to distinguish themselves from the ordinary village folk in their dress, manner of speech, food and recreations. Imitation of urban ways in the last decade and a half has come to be recognized as a distinguishing feature of respectable elements of the village population.

Introduction of democratic government in Hyderabad after the Police Action, has brought about a sudden burst of activity by a multitude of political parties in the rural areas of the State. Politics and elections appear to the people to be a sort of game, and they have not yet realized their deeper and wider implications. Affiliation with political parties provides an outlet to those who are ambitious and seek recognition of their importance.

Social status conferred on an individual by the caste system must be classified as 'ascribed status'. It is still a vital factor of status differentiation in the community, but the other factors leave

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554 sufficient scope for an individual to work his way towards the achievement of a new and higher status. While the social framework of caste is rigid and does not easily admit any variation in one's position in the traditional scale of social respectability, by taking recourse to the other factors a man can still improve his position and gain social prestige. In general it could be said that under the impact of modern socio-economic trends in the criteria for status differentiation there has been a swing from an ascribed status system to an achieved status system. However, the grip of the traditional system is still firm, and people from lower castes or others with humble origins must behave with considerable tact and discretion if they seek to enhance their influence and importance in the community. If such people acquire land, wealth, official position or some special skill by their own efforts, they can gain social prestige if they avoid ostentation and exhibitionism and insist on not transgressing the limits imposed on them by tradition. If such a man behaves with becoming modesty, people would say, 'Look, even wealth has not turned his head. He has not forgotten his low birth and traditional status. He is a good man. Such people always succeed in life.' On the contrary, display of self-importance and lack of courtesy on his part would lead to adverse comment. People would say, 'If a person of humble origin grows rich, his head is turned. Look at this man! Until the other day his father was a bricklayer. With a few hundred rupees in his pocket he behaves as if he owns the village.'

554 827 Birth, wealth and special personal qualities are marks of distinction, but they do not fall to the lot of the average man. The common villager regards self-sufficiency and stability as a mark of respectability. Here is a generalized picture of such a person in the words of one of our informants belonging to an average family of Reddi agriculturists: 'He is not rich, but he lives well and eats well. Quarrels are not heard in his home and there are no scandals about them. He lends to no one, but neither does he borrow from anyone. He is a contented man.' In the words of a Muslim cultivator, 'If you get enough to eat twice, if not thrice every day, if your wife and children have sufficient cloth to cover their bodies, and if you have a small house, a pair of bullocks and some fields of your own, there is nothing else that you should desire.' To quote one more informant, a Madiga untouchable: 'How many people can be rich? It is no blessing to worry half your life in order to

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amass wealth, and spend the rest of it worrying about its safety. The cultivator need not be rich. It is enough if he has not to lower himself before others begging for their favours.'

2. STANDARD OF LIVING: FOUR LEVELS

In Shamirpet four levels denoting different standards of living are vaguely recognized by the villagers. They are:

i. Rich.
ii. Well-to-do.
iii. Average.
iv. Poor.

It is difficult to lay down any precise rules to classify the different families living in the village into these levels on the basis of their standards of living. As these distinctions are based primarily on the differences in earning, it may be generally said that families with an income of Rs. 200 per month or more would be regarded as 'rich', those earning between Rs. 100 and 200 as 'well-to-do', those earning Rs. 45 to 100 as 'average' and those earning less than Rs. 45 as 'poor'. The average family unit in these calculations consists of five—three adults and two children.

According to this test which reflects the consensus of opinion in the village, our socio-economic survey of the community would indicate the following classification of the village population:

Rich	4%	Average	34%
Well-to-do	22%	Poor	40%

The following table indicates average percentage of consumer expenditure on different items, based on the family budgets of three consecutive years of a total sample of one hundred and twenty families representing the four levels of living:

ITEMS AND PERCENTAGE OF EXPENDITURE

Level	1 *Food (including fats and spices)*	2 *Clothing (including ornaments)*	3 *Feasts and ceremonies*	4 *Repairs and maintenance of the house*	5 *Luxuries (including tobacco and liquor)*	6 *Miscellaneous (entertainments, medicine, etc.)*
	%	%	%	%	%	%
1. Rich	34	15	18	11	12	10
2. Well-to-do	40	14	18	10	12	6
3. Average	48	12	12	8	15	5
4. Poor	56	10	11	5	15	3

From the above it is clear that on each successive lower level the percentage of expenditure on food—that is, on cereals, meat,

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178 advantages perceived, responsibilities recognized.'[1] Extending this approach to technical and organizational changes in peasant communities, we can attribute some changes in the life-ways of the people to State compulsion and legal prescription. In some spheres, particularly in material culture and technology, utility, convenience, availability and price determine to a great extent
178 the adoption of new elements and traits. The prestige factor too is
554 significant, for any externally induced or internally inspired change in the system of status evaluation brings in its wake significant modifications in the organization and life-ways of society. Innovation, variety and change for its own sake can also account for substantial variation from established norms in social behaviour at a given point of time. In a small rural community such as Shamirpet, which is situated near a big and modern city and is in everyday contact with it, the prevailing climate of opinion in social, economic and political matters in the city is bound to influence its general outlook and ways, for apart from their practical value city-ways are gradually coming to be regarded as more 'respectable' and 'progressive'.

178 So far State compulsion has been instrumental in bringing about
[151] little social and cultural change in the village community. Compulsory vaccination as well as inoculation at the time of an epidemic appear to be the only significant measures enforced by the State which have been accepted in the everyday life of the com-
[783] munity. Although untouchability has been abolished by law, in actual practice it only gives to the hitherto untouchables an equal share in public utilities, for considerations of pollution bar all effective interaction between the high and the low castes especially in the social spheres of inter-dining and inter-marriage. Symbolic as it is, this gesture of the State has nevertheless brought about a considerable modification in the inter-group attitudes between the clean and untouchable castes.

178 The factors of utility, convenience and availability have played
757 a more important role in bringing several new elements into the life of the community. Although indigenous herbs and magico-religious practices are still continued in the treatment of diseases the efficacy and utility of allopathic drugs and injections have greatly changed the attitude of the people towards modern medicine. I have pointed out earlier that they eagerly seek these

[1] Raymond Firth, *Elements of Social Organization* (London, 1951), p. 85.

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medicines and injections. The old beliefs and practices survive, partly because of the non-availability of quick and efficient modern treatment, and partly also because of its prohibitive cost. Besides the two systems do not conflict, and in order to be doubly sure, most people continue magico-religious practices along with modern medicinal treatment. Adoption of several new tools and instruments for occupational work, as well as of several other items of Western technology, such as buses, railways, razors, and electric torches, introduced in the comparatively recent times is due to their efficiency and utility. In the matter of dress and ornament other factors must also be taken into account. Mill-made cloth was not regarded only as cheap and more durable; it came to be looked upon as more respectable also. The coarse handloom cloth was regarded as rustic, the finer mill-cloth, on the other hand, was more refined and dignified. Further, mill-made cloth allowed a wider range of choice in the matter of colours, designs and patterns. The style of dress was influenced by a variety of factors. Under Muslim rule the style of dress of the rulers became fashionable. With Congress in power there was a sudden switch from the Muslim court-dress to Congress-patronized national dress. Modern Indian—as well as Western-style clothes—cigarettes, sun-glasses and tea are not only popular because of their utility, they possess a great prestige value as well.

Influence of the city has brought about adjustment and modification in several spheres, but the need of balancing different extremes in the organization of the community has so far prevented any drastic structural change in village communities. Under the impact of the new socio-economic factors the family ties have weakened, the kin-group has lost some of its characteristic strength and in the system of status evaluation achieved-status is competing with traditionally ascribed status; but the society still continues to be caste-structured as caste plays a vital role in its social, economic and ritual organization. Democracy has brought in its wake party organization and elections which demand group formation and group allegiance: in several rural areas no new groups have emerged, the loyalties of the people have only been re-affirmed to the pre-existing caste groups. While no important social or economic projects and reforms have so far been put into operation, the first major political change—the

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tion will probably have modified this very considerably in a few decades.

The fundamental drive in the thought and activities of the group seems to be towards the goal of the adjustment of the individual to the universe. Several aspects of man's life are predetermined and he has to reconcile himself to his fate. But one need not therefore resign oneself to that fate, for actions in one's life-time can not only modify what has been predestined, but can also determine the course of life after death. Thus a life ordered according to the prescriptions of *dharma*, the traditionally approved 'correct way of life', mitigates some of the evils of the past and adds to one's merit which in its turn ensures happiness in this and future lives. The ideal pattern of adjustment with the universe is laid down by the *dharma* and comprises performance of sacramental rituals, observance of fasts and festivals, avoidance of acts and thoughts declared by religion as sinful, and rigid adherence to caste rules and taboos. Cheating in regard to some of the social and religious injunctions and prescriptions is practised, and is even regarded as permissible if it can be compensated with greater devotion in some other sphere. When such cheating becomes too open or hits the structural unity, stability and continuity of the community, it is punished; but as long as it remains personal and private one can hope to supplicate divine forces in other ways to win their forgiveness for some lapses and acts of omission and commission. All human acts are not attributed to individual volition; the unseen hand of destiny is found to motivate one's actions and decisions under many situations. Radical departures from traditional life-ways are often attributed to fate. On the whole rigid adherence to traditional life-ways is regarded as the ideal and most satisfactory method of adjustment with the universe and its unseen forces. Activities of political parties, particularly of the Communist Party, have tried to awaken people to a more positive attitude, not without total lack of success, but the new ideas are still greeted with frank dismay and scepticism and so far there has been very little change in their basic attitude towards life and the principal goal of the community, which still remains peaceful adjustment and adaptation to the laws that control the universe.

In inter-personal as well as inter- and intra-group relations, the people tend to view everything as hierarchically structured. All things, groups and people, must fit into higher, equal or lower

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829 554 levels. Castes are either superior, more or less equal, or inferior. This view extends to gods, animals and foods. This hierarchical setting does not denote status only, it denotes power as well. Thus people love to dominate; but they hate being dominated, and where they must accept domination of anyone higher, they in their turn seek to dominate all who occupy a lower position in the hierarchy. Man is superior to woman, therefore, she must obey him. But a mother is superior to children, to sons when they are not adults, and always to daughters and daughters-in-law, and she will therefore dominate them. A child must obey the elders, but he too can dominate a younger sibling. Superior castes can dominate inferior castes; the rich dominate the poor; those in authority dominate those who lack it. Age, kinship status, wealth and authority—together with caste—determine the superior and inferior statuses. When there are conflicts as a result of the desire to dominate in one, and hatred of domination in the other, either there is an open breach, or on 'respectable' levels there is a sort of vague compromise and adjustment under which the person with the superior status maintains the semblance of his authority by letting it become virtually ineffective and the person with the inferior status never challenges it seriously because in actual practice he does not feel its weight. Possessiveness and love of domination characterize most of the thoughts, ambitions and actions of the people, although under certain situations they are compelled to compromise with necessity and shed their power to maintain the fiction of their superiority. The new socio-political climate of the country has necessitated some adjustments and modifications in the nature of hierarchy and tone of domination; but basically the view of the people remains the same. As a concession to the changing times superior castes will not treat inferior castes harshly; but they still expect formal recognition of their superiority from the latter. A defiant low caste person would be subjected to several types of direct or indirect social presure; but one adhering to tradition and 'keeping his status in mind' would succeed in getting much better treatment.

829 The fundamental concepts of the rights and equality of men mean little to these people, whose visions are thus bounded by their own observation of the world. This is perhaps the most unexpected aspect of the village community for a Western mind to grasp, and it leads to its particular view of change. If people